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SUBJECT: THAILAND PUSHES FOR USG ENGAGEMENT ON ASEAN
CONNECTIVITY

REF: A. BANGKOK 113
[1](#)B. 09 TOKYO 2567
[1](#)C. 09 STATE 94920

[1](#)1. (SBU) MFA Department of ASEAN Affairs Counselor Suriya Chindawongse told PolOff and EXBS Advisor February 12 that ASEAN leaders had prioritized Connectivity, an ASEAN initiative established by heads of state and government in October 2009. Suriya told us that ASEAN would promote Connectivity as it would facilitate community building among Southeast Asian nations, and because it would assist in maintaining ASEAN centrality in regional architecture. As such, ASEAN would push for inclusion of the project as a primary agenda item for meetings with Dialogue Partners.

[1](#)2. (SBU) There are three main focus areas for Connectivity, Suriya said. These were "hardware", which included physical linkages such as air, land, and sea transportation infrastructure; "software" such as legal and other facilitation arrangements including Customs and Immigration procedures; and connecting hearts and minds within ASEAN. Security issues including transnational crime and the transfer of materials for WMD would also be important areas for consideration. Security was an area of emphasis for Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, according to Suriya, and the Thai MFA planned to consider this carefully as it was important that Thailand and ASEAN were considered safe and secure links in the global supply chain.

[1](#)3. (SBU) To highlight the importance of the Connectivity project, many ASEAN Foreign Ministers had joined an overland trip from Mukdahan on the Thai-Lao border across Laos through the Lao Bao border crossing to Vietnam and on to Danang for the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat, Suriya said. ASEAN had organized the trip in order to give Foreign Ministers a better awareness of what would be needed to improve transportation links within Southeast Asia. As Foreign Minister Kasit considered ASEAN Connectivity a priority, the MFA had in January prepared a paper to further develop the concept, which FM Kasit tabled for consideration at the Foreign Ministers retreat.

LOWER MEKONG INITIATIVE TIED TO ASEAN CONNECTIVITY

[1](#)4. (SBU) While recognizing that the Philippines was coordinator for U.S.-ASEAN dialogue, the MFA would like to discuss means of engagement with the USG due to FM Kasit's

strong interest in the project, Suriya said. The RTG hoped that the USG would engage strategically with ASEAN on Connectivity so that the project would be considered an important area of discussion for all levels of U.S.-ASEAN dialogue. Suriya raised the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), launched by Secretary Clinton in July, as a possible mechanism for assisting ASEAN Connectivity. As such, Suriya asked when the U.S. would propose to hold the next LMI meeting. The MFA also pointed out that ASEAN Connectivity would address the main objectives of State's EXBS program, and hoped that the two initiatives would be complementary.

JAPAN, CHINA PUSH ASEAN-MEKONG INITIATIVES

15. (SBU) Suriya described China and Japan as having been the most active in helping ASEAN promote Connectivity. The Chinese were pressing hard for implementation of projects to be funded through \$20.5 billion that had been pledged for investment cooperation and credit for infrastructure projects. Japan, having pledged \$2 billion, was pushing forward by means of a November 2009 Japan-Mekong Leaders Summit and a recent visit of a ten-person team to Thailand to explore avenues of linking the Japanese Mekong initiative with ASEAN's Connectivity project.

16. (SBU) While the Chinese and the Japanese were the most active so far in engaging on Connectivity, ASEAN preferred that many entities were engaged on the issue, Suriya said. As such, Thailand and other ASEAN nations were very interested in learning more about USG thinking in regard to

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assisting ASEAN Connectivity.

HIGH-LEVEL TASK FORCE TO DEVELOP CONNECTIVITY CONCEPT

17. (SBU) Suriya told us that ASEAN would appoint a high-level task force at the end of February or in early March to develop a master plan for Connectivity, and expected that the plan would be submitted for approval by the leaders of ASEAN nations in October. Regarding concerns about how to insure that an interconnected ASEAN was safe, Suriya asked for USG assistance in providing papers or studies on USG lessons learned regarding border security in an interconnected world.

Suriya also suggested that capacity building and transportation infrastructure lessons from the Mississippi River could be applied to the Mekong area.

THAI MFA ADJUSTS WHO WILL ASEAN REPRESENTATION

18. (SBU) Suriya told us that Deputy Permanent Secretary Chitriya Pinthong would replace the Permanent Secretary as Thailand's representative at ASEAN Senior Officials Meetings.

This was the result of a recent reorganization of the MFA (REF A) that had led to the Permanent Secretary gaining more responsibility for management of the Ministry. As such, ASEAN issues would be coordinated by either Foreign Minister Kasit or Deputy PermSec Chitriya.

JOHN